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CHINA

CHINA

THE WORLD'S

GREAT MISSION FIELD.

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CHINA, THE WORLD'S GREAT MISSION FIELD.

CHINA is sometimes known as the Middle Kingdom, because the people regard it as the centre of the earth. It is popularly known among Europeans and Americans as the Celestial Empire, because the Chinese regard their country as an empire ruled over by a heavenly dynasty. Missionary endeavor does not concern itself with the government of China. It aims to turn China to Christ, and thus bring this great nation into the enjoyment of the succors and hopes of the Gospel. We want China for Christ. This is the result we seek, this the conquest we would make. An army proposing to take a fort would neglect no opportunity to get the facts about the stronghold against which they were about to march. They would study carefully its topography, its garrison, and its armament in order that they might adopt the very best methods of attack, and accurately determine the probabilities of success. Marshalled by the Lord Jesus to see what can be done to bring China in subjection to his Mediatorial reign, let us study for a few moments the task assigned,—the problem that confronts us.

I. GEOGRAPHY.

Mr. Bainbridge, in his "Around the World Tour of Christian Missions," calls attention to some geographical features of China as compared with those of the United States. The resemblances are certainly noteworthy. China extends from about 25 de-

grees north latitude to 45 north, and the United States lies very nearly between the same parallels. China is governed through a system of provinces, as the American Union is governed through a system of states. China owns several outlying dependencies, such as Thibet, Corea, &c., which correspond with Utah, Alaska and other territories in their relation to the United States. China's eastern border looks out to the sea, so does that of the land in which we dwell. In China and in the United States alike a great river cuts the country in two, only the Yangste-Kiang divides China from west to east, while the Mississippi divides the United States from north to south. The Yangste-Kiang and the Mississippi have each a large city near their mouth; and Shanghai may be regarded as the New Orleans of China. Mitchell's Atlas of the World puts down the area of China and that of the United States as nearly the same, each having over 3,500,000 square miles.

II. POPULATION.

China is inhabited by at least 400,000,000 of human souls. A recent writer says: "Here are a third more people than in all the countries of Europe together; twice as many as in the four continents of North and South America, Africa and Oceanica. If the population of this immense empire should join hands singly in an unbroken line, they would reach ten times around our globe. Let them march before us as an army at the rate of thirty miles a day, and the days will become weeks, and the weeks months, and the months years, yes, twenty-three long years

may pass, before the tramp, tramp of the martial host is ended. One third nearly of all the human race is Chinese; a third of all for whom Christ died, and to whom the Gospel is to be proclaimed; a third of all in whose keeping is wrapt up the future of our world; a third of all those that are to appear at the last great day before the judgment seat of Almighty God. Of this vast aggregation of human beings only one-tenth are reached by the Gospel, and thirty-three thousand of them are passing from time into eternity every day." What christian heart cau contemplate these facts, and remain unmoved?

III. RELIGION.

The religions of China are three: Confucianism Buddhism and Taonism. The first is really more a philosophy than a religion, and is the sole belief of the educated classes. It has much to do with this world but leaves the next out of the account. Confucianism and Taonism are indigenous, but Buddhism was introduced from India. This last, though once very potential, and at present quite wide-spread, is fast losing its influence over the people. At one time these three beliefs held a fierce struggle with each other. But now all antagonism has ceased. Indeed, it is not now unusual for all three faiths to be professed by the same person. When two really polite persons meet, the question is asked, "To what sublime religion do you belong?" If it be found that they hold different beliefs, each proceeds to pronounce a eulogy, not on his own religion, but on the religion of the other, and at last they part, saying,

"Religions are many, reason is one, we are all brothers." Here we have a striking proof of the religious indifferentism of the Chinaman. We all allow that neither Confucianism, nor Buddhism, nor Taonism can save. If there is anyone in China that lives up to the light he has—does as well as he knows—no doubt he will be saved, without the remedial scheme proposed in the gospels; but alas for China! there is no such soul in all its borders: alas for the world! there is no such soul in all its limits. Hence the absolute necessity of going into all the world and making known to every creature that one divine plan by which atonement is made for sin and justification offered to the sinner.

IV. THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED.

The statistics of non-Romanistic missions in China for 1887 are as follows: missionaries. exclusive of native helpers 1,030; members of churches 32,260; pupils in schools 13,777; contributions by native churches $38,236.70. These statements include work of American Baptists; but let us look particularly at what has been done by our own denomination in the United States. American Baptist Missionary Union, in 1887: churches 18, members 1,516, missionaries 29, helpers 73. Southern Baptist Convention in 1888: members 727, missionaries 21, helpers 30, contributions $446.58. A few figures will show the remaining destitution in China. The most highly favored province is Fun-Kien. It has a population of 10,000,000, and has 60 missionaries, or

1 preacher of the gospel to 167,000 souls. The same proportion would give Baltimore not quite three ministers of the Gospel, and Richmond one minister for not quite one-half of his time. The least favored province is Hunan, which has a population of 16,000,000 without one missionary living among them. If this province had one missionary for its 16,000,000, it would be only as well supplied as the United States would be if we had but four ministers in the whole extent of our country.

V. ENCOURAGEMENTS.

Our greatest encouragement is that God has pledged himself to give to Christ "the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." Alas! that our faith seizes so feebly this inspiring assurance. But God is constantly opening to us other sources of hope. A few years ago China was to the christian church a walled city with its gate firmly closed and barred. Now we see on the north, twelve gates, on the south, twelve gates, on the east, twelve gates, and on the west, twelve gates; and every one of them swinging back to give easy entrance to the Gospel missionary. Or perhaps we should say the wall itself has toppled, and now lies as flat as the one that fell in by-gone days to give Jericho as a possession to the host of the Lord.

Early in this year the Emperor issued an edict, in which he speaks of the missionaries as "guests," and directs that, inasmuch as they come to teach morals, they must not be interfered with. Influen-

tial men have recently sent up to the throne a petition, requesting that western studies be added to those branches that must be pursued by all seeking degrees and promotion.

During the last ten years the gain in converts has been 120 per cent. over the entire period going before.

Let us make a mightier effort to redeem China. Let us pray more, give more, toil more with reference to this end. As goes China, so goes the East, whether for Christ or against Christ. Let us be stimulated to greater activity by the noble deeds of others. Last year the China Inland Mission called for one hundred new men. Scores responded to the call. At the same time $50,000 was asked for to meet the expenses of the proposed enlargement; and eleven persons promptly contributed the entire amount. Let God's people only begin to do their duty, and soon China will become the Celestial Empire indeed,—reigned over by a celestial King, and made bright by a celestial light.

FOOT-BINDING IN CHINA.

Small feet among the women of China are a sign of respectability, and although there is no law for footbinding, yet it is an iron custom. Missionaries who have lived long in China give it as their experience that this cruel custom is one great cause of the infanticide throughout this vast empire. The ability of girls to earn their living is greatly lessened by this practice, and parents regard their girls as useless burdens, except for the money to be obtained through their marriage. There is no prescribed age at which the process of binding is commenced, but in families of easy circumstances the bandages are put on as soon as the child is able to walk; otherwise the feet are permitted to grow until betrothment, or till seven or eight years of age. The whole operation is performed, and the shape maintained by bandages. A strip of muslin, two or three inches wide and two or three feet long, is bound tightly about the foot and ankle, commencing at the big toe, winding it around the toes, folded down about the foot and heel, drawing the heel forward toward the toes, thus shortening the foot and forcing the ankle or instep up. It requires about eleven years of such

binding to bring the foot to the required size, and great pain and suffering is occasioned by the process. Little girls grow pale, thin and weak under the ordeal. No matter how low the family in the social scale, they may bind the daughter's feet if they can afford to do so. Mrs. B——, of our China Mission, says: "The poor girl or woman, hobbling along clutching at this or that to keep herself from falling, or leaning with one hand on a cane, and the other on the shoulder of a child, or led by a servant, is really a poor cripple for life. Even some of those who adopt the custom for their daughters, admit its evils, but always add: "It is our custom and there is no help for it."

Missionaries have found it difficult to know what to do with this deep-seated custom. One says: "I believe the most beneficial influence can be exerted by missionary ladies who are in earnest in this matter."

A great effort has been made to abolish the practice among native Christians. A Chinese expressed himself thus in regard to it: "Now I think when the Holy Spirit comes down on China, giving men and women to know the 'Jesus doctrines,' this custom of binding feet will of itself disappear." In many places the prejudice is giving way, and there is great hope that the introduction of Christianity will become effectual to remove this heathenish custom. We give an extract of a letter from one of the society's missionaries, who has had some experience in her school: "Last spring, while I was visiting the

Kung Lung school, the helper there spoke against the practice of foot-binding, and said no native girl could get about, to accomplish what I did. I thought possibly he was only talking for effect, so the next time he visited the school to see his betrothed, I asked him, in the presence of the whole school, if he would like his betrothed to unbind her feet. I knew the girl would not do it, but thought it a fine opportunity to test the man, knowing that if he stood up to his principles, the effect would be good. He replied that he wouid be very glad to have her unbind her feet, and let them grow according to the will of God. I saw the girl was very angry, but considered that of no consequence, as her conscience was not yet educated up to the proper point. A few days afterward one of the girls unbound her feet and came to ask me to help her make some stockings. I asked her if she did not fear her family would punish her, but she said she would simply let them do so. I know she has will enough to carry her through anything, so I helped her to get up some stockings and large shoes.

"Several others of the girls would like to follow her example if they dared. When school closed, there was one girl whom we thought too unpromising to retain in school. We sent her home, but the next day her mother-in-law, in great distress, brought her back, saying she was out nursing, and already had her youngest son with her; her eldest son, betrothed to this girl, was put out to pasture cattle for his rice, and there was no one left at home to care

for this girl. Her husband was an opium smoker, who did nothing but beg enough to get his opium. He had already stolen the girl from her once and sold her, but she had got her back again, and she feared if we did not keep her, he would get her again. Besides, if she took her she would lose the place where she was working, for they would not let her bring the girl there. I knew all these circumstances before, but since our school is not an institution for mere charitable relief of poor people, I did not think the girl should remain—she seemed too stupid. Finally, I made a proposition to the woman, which I had not the faintest idea she would accept. I told her I would take her and do the best I could for her personally, provided she would unbind her feet. I was surprised beyond measure that the woman consented to this, and the poor girl was capable of gratitude to a degree also surprising. I fixed up some stockings and shoes for her, which made her quite proud, and she began at once to call me "mamma." After I had her feet nicely dressed in large shoes and stockings, three of the girls begged me to let them unbind their feet. I told them to wait until they could talk with their friends, for I feared they might afterwards waver in their purpose. But we feel that a beginning has been made—small though it be—in the right direction. This whole section of country has not one native woman with natural feet. We have connected with our work, eight girls who are allowing their feet to grow.

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